



and work off-farm can be difficult. Text messages, calendars, white boards, spreadsheets, and family meetings are ways to maintain communication when there are appointments, meetings, kids' schedules, and the daily operation of a farm.

"We hold each other accountable by having a calendar and family meetings," Brenny says. "We know who is paying what bill and our projects for the week. You figure out the cycle of your farm and plan major events around that."

Brenny says an added benefit of working off-farm is the network she has been able to create with other farmers and professionals in the industry. She has found that she has other farmers to bounce ideas off and get questions about farming answered.

"What people gain from off-farm employment truly broadens their horizons," Rossow says. "They grow intellectually, professionally, emotionally, and they make many business contacts that can help their operation in the future."

"It isn't glamorous, sometimes it is a choice," Brenny says. "Bills have to be paid, but the opportunities for growth are endless."

Ted and Katie Brenny raise beef cattle near Mazeppa, Minn. The couple both hold jobs off the farm to supplement their farm income.

Minnesota's complex buffer law continues to evolve

In June 2015, the Minnesota legislature enacted the Riparian Protection and Water Quality Practices law, the so-called buffer law. This first-of-its-kind law affects an estimated 110,000 acres of land, much of it farmland, and represents one of the most sweeping environmental regulations directly affecting Minnesota's farmers.

In general, the law requires that landowners maintain buffers around certain waterways in the state. The buffers must consist of perennial vegetation that protects the water from runoff, stabilizes soils, shores and banks, and protects riparian corridors. Around "public waters," landowners must maintain buffers with a 50-foot average width. Around public drainage systems, landowners must maintain buffers with a 16.5 foot minimum width. Buffers, or a permitted alternative, must be established by November 1, 2017 around public waters and by November 1, 2018 around public drainage systems.



Since 2015 when the law was enacted, there has been activity both on an administrative and legislative level which clarifies the law. In the 2016 session, the legislature amended the buffer law to clarify a number of items, including that the "public waters" subject to the buffer law includes only those waters on the DNR's public waters inventory, which was prepared in the early 1980s. In addition, the DNR has since produced a "buffer map" which shows all waters subject to the buffer law. The Minnesota Board of Water & Soil Resources (BWSR) has issued technical guidance which local soil and water districts can use in assisting landowners in implementing permitted alternative practices instead of buffer strips. The guidance includes several common alternative practices that may be implemented including using conservation tillage methods, using alternative filter strips or forest buffers in accordance with federal standards, and managing areas with "negative slopes"—where there is a berm

around a ditch or water way that otherwise prevents runoff. BWSR has also proposed additional administrative rules and guidance related to penalty and enforcement aspects of the buffer law and how BWSR will review local watershed district ordinances and policies. In addition, as of the time of this writing, there are efforts in the Minnesota legislature to further amend the law, including to delay the date when buffers must be established until November 1, 2018 for both public waters and public drainage systems. Finally, although there is a possibility that the buffer law may still be challenged by landowners on the basis that the buffer requirement may constitute a "taking" under state and federal constitutions, no court has yet weighed in on the question. Until a landowner challenges the law in court, the constitutional consequences and fallout of the buffer law remain to be seen.

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